

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L VIENTIANE 6665

LIMDIS

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, LA, TH

SUBJECT: UNCERTAINTY PERSISTS ON OPENING OF LAO-THAI LAND
BORDER

BEGIN SUMMARY: HOPES AT CHRISTMAS TIME THAT THE LAO-THAI
LAND BORDER WOULD BE OPENED TO PERMIT THE DEPARTURE OF
THE FRENCH MILITARY MISSION'S BAGGAGE AND THE ARRIVAL OF
SHIPMENTS FOR VARIOUS EMBASSIES IN VIENTIANE WERE DIS-
APPOINTED. IT DEVELOPED THAT AFTER HAVING INITIALLY
AGREED TO THE ARRANGEMENT THE LAO GOVERNMENT CHANGED ITS
POSITION, ON THE GROUNDS THAT SPECIAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR
THE MMF AND FOREIGN EMBASSIES WERE OF NO USE TO IT, AND
INSISTED ON GENERAL OPENING OF THE LAND BORDER BY THE
THAI. THE FRENCH FEEL THAT BAD FAITH WAS SHOWN BY BOTH
THAI AND LAO IN THIS AFFAIR AND THE AUSTRALIANS AND THE
BRITISH FEEL THAT THEY WASTED A LOT OF TIME IN PREPARA-
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TORY PAPER WORK. THE U.S. EMBASSY WHICH MADE NO REQUESTS

OF EITHER THAILAND OR LAOS IN REGARD TO THE BORDER CONTINUES TO AWAIT DEVELOPMENTS AND WILL TAKE ADVANTAGE OF WHATEVER FACILITIES BECOME GENERALLY AVAILABLE. THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS IN VIENTIANE IS BECOMING ACQUAINTED WITH LOCAL CONCEPTS OF THE PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICE OF LAW AND DIPLOMACY. END SUMMARY.

1. AT CHRISTMAS TIME THE WORD HAD SPREAD IN VIENTIANE DIPLOMATIC COMMUNITY THAT THE LAND FRONTIER BETWEEN LAOS AND THAILAND AT THE THADEUA-NONGKHAI CROSSING WOULD BE OPENED ON MONDAY, DECEMBER 29 TO PERMIT THE ENTRY INTO LAOS OF SHIPMENTS INTENDED FOR VARIOUS EMBASSIES AND THE EXIT FROM LAOS OF THE IMPEDIMENTA OF THE DEPARTING FRENCH MILITARY MISSION (MMF). FRENCH, AUSTRALIANS AND BRITISH HAD PREPARED A LOT OF PAPERWORK AND HAD MADE DETAILED ADMINISTRATIVE ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE MOVES. THE FRENCH, WE UNDERSTAND, HAD RECEIVED THE APPROVAL OF BOTH THE LAO AND THAI GOVERNMENTS OF PROCEDURES WHICH INCLUDED THE ENTRY OF SOME 35 THAI TRUCKS TO THANALENG, TWO KILOMETERS FROM THADEUA, WHERE THEY WOULD BE LOADED WITH THE BAGGAGE AND PERSONAL EFFECTS OF MEMBERS OF THE MMF AND DESPATCHED ACROSS THE RIVER TO NONGKHAI EN ROUTE TO BANGKOK.

2. THE FRENCH, BECAUSE OF THE SCOPE OF THEIR SHIPPING PROBLEM AND THEIR FREQUENT CONTACTS WITH THE LAO AUTHORITIES ON THE SUBJECT WERE THE FIRST TO BECOME AWARE THAT ALL WAS NOT GOING WELL. FRENCH COUNSELOR LAMBERT TOLD ME DECEMBER 26 THAT AFTER ALL ARRANGEMENTS HAD BEEN MADE, EVERYTHING WAS ONCE MORE IN DOUBT AND HE WAS NOT AT ALL SURE THE BORDER OPENING WOULD OCCUR ON SCHEDULE. FRENCH MILITARY SOURCES TOLD DATT DECEMBER 27 THAT THE LAO HAD AGREED TO THE ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE DEPARTURE OF THE MMF BAGGAGE AND EFFECTS AND HAD SO INFORMED THE FRENCH EMBASSY. SUBSEQUENTLY THE LAO HAD CHANGED THEIR MINDS AND TOLD THE FRENCH THAT OPENING THE BORDER FOR THE CONVIENCE OF THE FRENCH MILITARY MISSION AND THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS WAS OF NO USE TO THE LAO. THEY WANTED THE BORDER OPENED TO ALL SHIPMENTS.

3. FRENCH AMBASSADOR CRDI TOLD ME DECEMBER 27 AT FOR-CONFIDENTIAL

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EIGN MINISTER PHOUNE SIPVASEUTH'S RECEPTION FOR "THE FINAL DEPARTURE FROM LAOS OF MEMBERS OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONTROL COMMISSION" THAT THE BORDER OPENING WOULD NOT TAKE PLACE AS EXPECTED AND ARRANGED. HE ADDED THAT THERE HAD BEEN "BAD FAITH ON BOTH SIDES," MEANING THE LAO AND THE THAI.

4. AUSTRALIAN AMBASSADOR FORSYTHE ARRIVED AT THE SAME

RECEPTION STILL THINKING THAT ALL WAS SET FOR THE BORDER OPENING ON DECEMBER 29. I TOLD HIM I HAD HEARD THERE WAS A HANG-UP AND STEERED HIM TO SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS NOUPHAN SITHPASAY FOR DETAILS. FORSYTHE ASKED NOUPHAN ABOUT REPORTS THE BORDER WOULD NOT OPEN AND WAS TOLD IN REPLY: "MR. AMBASSADOR, LAOS HAS NEVER CLOSED THE BORDER WITH THAILAND." REPHRASING HIS QUESTION, FORSYTHE ASKED IF HIS EFFECTS COULD MOVE IN FROM THAILAND ON DECEMBER 29 AND WAS TOLD: "NO."

5. FURTHER CONVERSATIONS AMONG VARIOUS DIPLOMATS PRESENT TENDED TO CONFIRM THE FRENCH INFORMATION THAT, HAVING ASKED THE VARIOUS EMBASSIES IN VIENTIANE TO PUT PRESSURE ON THE THAI TO OPEN THE BORDER AND HAVING ASSURED THE FRENCH THAT THEY WOULD AGREE TO THE PASSAGE OF MMF AND DIPLOMATIC SHIPMENTS THE LAO CHANGED THEIR POSITION AND REJECTED THE IDEA OF ANY SPECIAL CONCESSIONS TO THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS AND THE MMF. THE FRENCH FEELING OF FRUSTRATION IS NO DOUBT COMPOUNDED BY TWO OTHER CONSIDERATIONS: A) THEY HAVE A CONSIDERABLE VOLUME OF PERSONAL EFFECTS STOCKPILED AT WATTAY AIRPORT, ORIGINALLY DESTINED FOR SHIPMENT ON AIR FRANCE AIRCRAFT WHICH NO LONGER CALL. WE UNDERSTAND THE LAO ARE NOW DEMANDING DETAILED INVENTORIES OF ALL THESE CRATES AND BOXES, MOST OF WHOSE OWNERS HAVE ALREADY DEPARTED, BEFORE AUTHORIZING THEIR SHIPMENT BY OTHER MEANS; B) THE FRENCH RECENTLY DELIVERED 28 TONS OF MEDICAL SUPPLIES FOR USE OF HOSPITALS IN VIENTIANE. IT APPEARS THAT MOST OF THIS MATERIAL WAS SHIPPED TO SAM NEUA OR ELSEWHERE AND NONE HAS REACHED ITS INTENDED DESTINATION. NEITHER, IT APPEARS, DID THE SHIPMENT GENERATE ANY GOODWILL FOR THE DONORS.

6. COMMENT: THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS IS RECEIVING VALU-
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ABLE ON-THE-JOB TRAINING IN LOCAL CONCEPTS OF THE PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICE OF LAW AND DIPLOMACY. THIS EMBASSY HAVING ASKED NOTHING OF EITHER THE LAO OR THE THAI IN THE WAY OF SPECIAL TRANS-BORDER SHIPMENTS WILL CONTINUE TO WAIT AND SEE AND WILL QUIETLY TAKE ADVANTAGE OF WHATEVER FACILITIES EVENTUALLY BECOME GENERALLY AVAILABLE. A SEPARATE MESSAGE ADDRESSES THE QUESTION OF POSSIBLE AIRLIFT OF GASOLINE.
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